ORDER NO. 90-1457

Address Telephone Directories (ATD) and Business and Consumer List Products 1988 Profit and Loss

	AT	Ds	B/C	Lists	Tot	tal
Revenues	\$	291,000	\$	277,000	\$	568,000
Expenses						
Direct	145,750		0	ļ	145,750	
Allocated	69,451	İ	243,779		313,230	
Total		215.201		243,779		458.980
Rev-Exp		75,799		33.221		109,020
Overhead		48,635		55,094		103,729
Profit <loss></loss>	\$	27,164	\$	<21.873>	\$	5,291

Sources: PNB response to interrogatory PUC 2-001, PNB and staff stipulation, and Direct Testimony of Janet Watkins, Ex.B.¹

Intracompany Relationships and Transactions

On August 24, 1982, United States District Court Judge Harold Greene entered a decision in *United States v. American Telephone and Telegraph Company, 552 F. Supp. 131 (D.D.C., 1982), aff'd sub nom. Maryland v. United States, 460 U.S. 1001, 103 S.Ci.1240, 75 L.Ed.2d 472 (1983), an anti-trust proceeding involving the Bell Telephone System. The decision in that case, commonly known as the Modified Final Judgment or MFJ, restructured the Bell System. Of particular importance, the MFJ regrouped the 22 Bell Operating Companies, which had been AT&T subsidiaries, into seven regional holding companies legally separate from AT&T. U S WEST, Inc. (U S WEST) is one of the holding companies. It encompasses 14 western states.*

PNB is one of the three operating companies which are subsidiaries of U S WEST. MRG is also a subsidiary of U S WEST. MRC and U S WEST Direct Company (USWD) are subsidiaries of MRG.

Official notice is taken of PNB's response to interrogatory PUC 2-001. Pursuant to OAR 860-14-050(2), a party may object to the fact noticed within 15 days of the notification and may explain or rebut the noticed fact.

ORDER NO. 90-1457

PNB is the only U S WEST company that is regulated by this Commission. Every service provided by PNB, except inside wire, is regulated. All revenues and all expenses incurred by PNB in the provision of every service except inside wire may be recognized "above the line" for rate-making purposes.

Prior to the breakup of the Bell System, PNB published the alphabetical and classified directories (white and yellow pages) and distributed the directories within its telephone service territory. Historically, profits from directory advertising have generated an important contribution to local telephone rates in Oregon and other states.²

USWD now publishes the white and yellow pages directories on behalf of PNB in Oregon. USWD sells the white and yellow page advertisements. U S WEST has attempted to transfer revenues away from PNB's regulated operations. The Commission has ordered that directory revenues shall remain with PNB or they will be imputed to PNB. See Order Nos. 88-488 and 88-1041 (UI 54), 89-1044 (UI 54-Supp), and 89-1807 (UT 85). These revenues, including advertising, are considered for ratemaking purposes and offset PNB's revenue needs.

In 1988 without Commission approval, PNB contracted with MRC to print PNB's Oregon ATD. MRC entered the market for ATDs in 1989.

In Order No. 89-179, (February 21, 1989), the Commission directed that:

Pacific Northwest Bell Telephone Company dba U S WEST Communications shall not abandon the provision of address telephone directories and business and consumer lists until specifically authorized by the Commission.

In March 1989, PNB sent a letter to its ATD customers advising them that it would not publish a 1989 book. The letter stated, "(A) similar type product is now offered by U S WEST Marketing Resources Group, a separate subsidiary of U S WEST, Inc." The notice directed them to a 1-800 number to contact an MRC representative. PNB sent a similar letter to its business and consumer list products customers.

In 1989, MRG and USWD purchased lists from PNB. MRG gave notice to PNB that USWD will not purchase any further lists, but MRG will continue to purchase the subscriber list update service. MRG plans to buy one list from PNB and provide the

²Order No. 89-1807 (December 29, 1989), at 3 et seq., contains an extensive discussion of the relationship between local telephone rates and revenues from directory advertising.

ORDER NO. 90-1457

list to both MRC and USWD. This action will further reduce the revenues to PNB from the sale of the lists.

PNB views itself as a resource for publishers to purchase the right to use non-confidential subscriber listings obtained in the process of providing exchange access line services. PNB owns and maintains the data base and the listings.

OPINION

Jurisdiction

In Order No. 89-1274, the Commission determined that it has jurisdiction over the services at issue in this case. PNB reiterated the jurisdictional issue in its brief. PNB raised similar jurisdictional issues in Pacific Northwest Bell Telephone Company, UT 85, Order 89-1807, at 9 et seq. The Commission dealt with the jurisdictional issue at length in that order. The rationale stated there is adopted here. Suffice it to say that PNB is a "telecommunications utility," within the meaning of ORS 759.005(1), and is subject to the regulatory jurisdiction of the Commission. ORS 756.515 allows the Commission to investigate and enter orders with respect to "any matter relating to any . . telecommunications utility". The Commission has jurisdiction over all services offered by a utility which are related to its activities as a regulated utility. Northwest Climate Conditioning v. Lobdell, 79 Or App 560, 720 P2d 1281 (1986).

Improper Diversion of Revenues

In this proceeding, PNB is seeking to divert revenues from regulated services to unregulated operations, while leaving substantial costs to be borne by basic service customers. The Commission has repeatedly stated its opposition to such actions. This order continues the Commission's policy of protecting ratepayers from improper diversion of revenues from regulated operations.

In spite of PNB's claims to the contrary, the effect on customers from the loss of revenues from ATD and business and consumer list products could be significant. PNB suggests that the only effect is loss of \$5,291 in profit from the services which it no longer intends to provide. This amount, it claims, is negligible and demonstrates that the services could be discontinued with little effect on the other ratepayers.

However, PNB ignores all the allocated expenses and overhead costs which it intends to leave with PNB's customers. The allocated expenses and overhead are costs which are incurred to provide both the ATD and business and consumer list products, as

ORDER NO. 90-1457

well as many other services provided to PNB's customers. For example, overhead includes costs for home office expenses and building rental. Allocated costs include costs for data processing, sales support and product management. These costs, totaling \$415,969 in 1988, will not disappear if PNB discontinues providing the services. PNB did not identify which expenses will continue if the Commission permits abandonment.

The Commission's efforts to evaluate the impact of the abandonment have been inhibited by PNB's failure to respond forthrightly to the staff's interrogatories. Without the information requested in the interrogatories, staff could not, and the Commission cannot, fully evaluate the profitability of the product. Failure to answer the interrogatories interferes with the Commission's ability to more definitively evaluate the impact of U S WEST's strategy to transfer a money-making enterprise off the regulated books of PNB.

In this case, PNB's petition to abandon ATD and consumer and business list products is a sham. PNB is disposing of utility property without authority in violation of ORS 759.375. In the process of violating this statute, PNB is ignoring a Commission order that it not abandon the provision of ATD's and business and consumer list products. Finally, this "abandonment" procedure is inappropriate for the type of relief PNB is requesting. The statutes provide appropriate mechanisms for PNB to conduct certain operations on the unregulated side of its business. However, before it does so, it must meet the requirements set forth in the statutes.

The importance of retaining revenues to maintain low basic service rates in underscored in *United States v. Western Electric Co., Inc., February 6, 1989, 1989 WL 53809 (copy attached as Appendix B to Brief of Staff).* There, Judge Greene considered a request of Ameritech, a regional holding company, for a waiver from the restriction on providing information services for Ameritech's "reverse directory" service known as CNA. The court granted the waiver on condition that the service supports local rates:

The Court previously ordered changes to be made in the decree, particularly with respect to the award of the Yellow Pages directories, bottomed in part upon its understanding that this would have the effect of protecting low telephone rates. Nevertheless, once that authority had been transferred

³PNB failed to respond adequately regarding PNB's percentage of the ATD market, the date when MRC entered the Oregon market, why U S WEST decided to have MRC enter the market in which PNB already had a presence, how many customers MRC has, MRC's revenues and expenses for the services at issue, and PNB's revenues for the services at issue for 1989. PNB could obtain all necessary information regarding MRC's operation through the aid of their parent holding company, U S WEST, if necessary.

order no. 90 - 1457

to them from AT&T, a number of the Regional Companies set up their yellow Pages operations in such a way that the profits from those operations flowed not to the rate paying public but to the companies' other, more 'conglomerate' ventures. The Court will not permit a similar diversion in this instance.

For the reasons stated, the court will grant the waiver Ameritech is requesting to provide CNA service throughout its region but only upon the filing by the Regional Company of an affidavit from a responsible official having company authority to do so certifying that CNA-generated revenues will be used solely to support rates for basic telephone service, as that company has represented, and not diverted to support other business ventures.

While the revenues generated may not be as great, Judge Greene, as well as this Commission, understands that the ATDs and business and consumer list products contribute to maintaining reasonable and affordable basic service rates.

Petition Fails to Show Abandonment

PNB's petition to abandon ATD and business and consumer list product services is denied. In its pleading initiating this proceeding, PNB gave "notice" to the Commission that it is abandoning these products. It filed notice under OAR 860-32-020 which provides:

(2) A public utility intending to discontinue a regulated service shall file a petition with the Commission. The petition shall be filed at least 60 days prior to the date the utility intends to abandon the service. At least 30 days prior to the date a public utility intends to abandon service, it shall notify affected customers of its intent. The public utility shall demonstrate that the abandonment will not deprive the public of necessary telecommunications services. The public utility shall agree to reinstate service at the request of the Commission to prevent the public from being deprived of necessary services.

Although PNB petitioned to "abandon" ATDs and business and consumer list products, this is not a true abandonment. Because another U S WEST subsidiary has taken over the products, this abandonment is little more than a manipulation of corporate entities for the purpose of diverting revenues to shareholders. U S WEST, as the

ORDER NO. 90-1457

holding company directing PNB's activities, has little intention of abandoning this service. It intends only to shift the revenues to the shareholders, while leaving ratepayers with many of allocated and overhead expenses. Since there is no true abandonment, the petition must be denied.

Disposition of Utility Property Without Authority

ORS 759.375 provides, in pertinent part:

- (1) No telecommunications utility doing business in Oregon shall without first obtaining the commission's approval of such transaction:
- (a) Sell lease, assign or otherwise dispose of the whole of the property of such telecommunications utility necessary or useful in the performance of its duties to the public or any part thereof of a value in excess of \$10,000, or sell, lease, assign or otherwise dispose of any franchise, permit or right to maintain and operate such telecommunications utility or telecommunications utility property, or perform any service as a telecommunications utility; . . .
- (2) Every such sale, lease, assignment, mortgage, disposition, encumbrance, merger or consolidation made other than in accordance with the order of the commission authorizing the same is void.

PNB is disposing of both a tangible and an intangible asset without Commission approval. The listings themselves are tangible assets. By selling the listings to MRG and abdicating the retail sales market, PNB is losing sales and profits. It is MRG which resells the listings to its customers and derives the benefits from the listings. The decision to stop pursuing retail customers for its listings is a disposition of utility property and is void without prior Commission approval.

Furthermore, the opportunity to publish ATDs and business and consumer list products is an intangible asset and is also subject to the provisions of ORS 759.375. In many respects these products are similar to yellow pages. These products are revenue generating activities of PNB which arise out of its status as the monopoly provider of basic telephone service. MRC and USWD have marketing advantages based on customer familiarity with the product promoted by the local exchange company. In addition, the customers of the product have faith in the quality of the ATD and list products. See Order Nos. 88-488 and 88-1041 (UI 54) and 89-1044 (UI 54-Supp). The petition to "abandon" the ATD and business and consumer list products is merely a guise

ORDER NO. 9 () - 1457

by PNB to obtain Commission ratification of its disposition of the property without approval under ORS 759.375.

ORS 759.375 specifies that the statutory minimum value of property requiring Commission approval prior to its disposition is \$10,000. ATDs and business and consumer list products appear to be valuable products. These products generated \$568,000 in revenues in 1988. The production of these directories translate into revenues for the company. Even though PNB was remiss in failing to provide clear financial data surrounding these services, the value is at least \$10,000.

However, much of the value of the assets to PNB's ratepayers has already been lost as a result of the transfer of activities to MRC. Rather than produce the directories itself and maintain the revenues on the regulated side of the business, PNB now views itself only as a resource for publishers to purchase the right to use non-confidential subscriber listings obtained in the process of providing exchange access line services. Under its current method of operation, PNB sells the lists to MRC or other publishers who, in turn, resell the lists to the customer. Once PNB sells the raw list, its only revenue source is the updates. The updates generate far less revenue than selling the entire list to a customer.

Furthermore, by causing PNB to discontinue active participation in the directory business, US WEST retained the value of the assets and diverted the revenues to its shareholders. In March 1989, PNB notified its customers that it would not produce a 1989 book and directed them to call MRC's 1-800 number to obtain a similar type product. (Exhibit 1, p.8, and attachment Exhibit J and K.) While in theory PNB and MRC compete for the same customers, it is clear US WEST is intending that the shareholders reap the benefits of publisher sales.⁵

Failure to Comply with the Intent of Commission Order

PNB and US WEST embarked on this course of action in direct contravention of a Commission order. In *Order No. 89-179*, the Commission ordered PNB not to abandon providing address telephone directories and business and consumer lists until specifically authorized to do so by the Commission. The March letters to the customers

⁴Because of PNB's incomplete responses to the staff interrogatories, it is difficult to determine what the impact on the ratepayers will be from the transfer of services.

⁵After MRG entered the market, PNB did not sell any list products in 1989. PNB did not show what revenue it received as a result of selling its subscriber lists.

ORDER NO. 90-1457

show that PNB discontinued providing updated versions of these products and left the market contrary to *Order No. 89-179*.

CONCLUSIONS

- 1. The Commission has jurisdiction over PNB's abandonment of ATD's and business and consumer list products.
- 2. PNB's petition to abandon ATD and business and consumer list product services is denied. The services provide revenues which are necessary to maintain basic telecommunications services.
- 3. In violation of ORS 759.375, PNB disposed of utility property with a value in excess of \$10,000 and a right to perform services as a public utility.
- 4. In violation of Order No. 89-179, PNB discontinued ATD and consumer and business list products prior to receiving Commission authorization to do so.

ORDER

IT IS ORDERED that:

- 1. Pacific Northwest Bell Telephone Company, dba U S WEST Communications, shall not abandon Address Telephone Directories and business and consumer list products services.
- 2. Pacific Northwest Bell Telephone Company, dba U S WEST Communications, shall publish, and offer for sale to the public, up-to-date Address Telephone Directories and business and consumer list products.
- 3. Without prior approval of the Commission, Pacific Northwest Bell Telephone Company, dba U S WEST Communications, shall not sell, transfer or make available its lists of subscribers to any person including U S WEST, Inc., and any affiliated company for the purposes of resale or general publication. In determining whether to grant such approval, the Commission will consider whether:

ORDER NO. 90-1457

- a. The proposed action constitutes the sale or transfer of benefits which inure to Pacific Northwest Bell Telephone Company dba U S WEST Communications' operations as a local exchange carrier; and
- b. The proposed sale or transfer would dilute or dissipate the assets or revenue of Pacific Northwest Bell Telephone Company dba U S WEST Communications in its operations as a local exchange carrier.

Made, entered, and effective

SEP 27 1990

Myron B. Katz

Chairman

Ron Eachus

Commissioner

A party may request rehearing or reconsideration of this order pursuant to ORS 756.561. A party may appeal this order pursuant to ORS 756.580.

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CERTIFICATE OF SERVICE

- I certify that on the $\frac{29t}{2}$ day of May 1996, I served the
- 3 foregoing REPLY COMMENTS OF THE OREGON PUBLIC UTILITY COMMISSION
- 4 upon the party(ies), hereto by mailing, regular mail, postage
- 5 prepaid, a true, exact and full copy thereof to:

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PAGE 15 - CERTIFICATE OF SERVICE

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